Journal of Sports and Games
Volume 2, Issue 3, 2020, PP 28-33
ISSN 2642-8466

Toward a Multidimensional Framework of Expertise and Professionalism in Sport Coaching. The Case for Adding Reflexivity to Reflective Practice

Philippe Crisp*

University of Chichester, College Lane, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 6PE, United Kingdom.

***Corresponding Author:** Philippe Crisp, University of Chichester, College Lane, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 6PE, United Kingdom.*

ABSTRACT

Accurately defining the full extent, scope, and reach of what it means to have professional expertise in sport coaching is difficult in the absence of true professional bodies, and the wide ecosystem of sport within which it operates. Whilst there are numerous models, criteria, and key principles attached to the idea of expertise in sport coaching, it is the contention of this opinion piece that – given the widely held appreciation that sport coaching requires knowledge of how to interact with others – the concept of reflexivity can be particularly useful in determining the extent to which coaches can demonstrate, and effect, expertise. The context and rationale for this, and subsequnt implications, are discussed within the paper.

Keywords: *Reflective practice, professions, expertise, interactional and interpersonal knowledges.*

INTRODUCTION- EXPERTISE IN COACHING

Within sports coaching literature, much emphasis is placed upon the accruement of knowledge that can help performance, and, to a lesser extent perhaps, theories of effective leadership in sport (1-2). Both of these ways of understanding theory and practice reflect, for many, what is considered 'expert' coaching. However, it should be noted that there are other ways of explaining what might be expertise in coaching. For instance, where subject knowledge and theories of leadership often focus on the capability of individuals to demonstrate leadership qualities, others consider this viewpoint to be somewhat limited in scope (3). This is because they assert that it is the relationships between coaches and participants that drive successful coaching, and that the field of sport coaching needs a theoretical framework that can encompass the inter subjective nature of relationships and the inherent social and power dimensions herewith. It is this multi-dimensional approach that this opinion piece looks to explore within the context of coach expertise.

By considering this theme, we can start by using the work of Côté and Gilbert (4) that more thoroughly determines what exactly constitutes coaching expertise than other, traditional, approaches. The crux of their work related to coaching expertise looks to outline how the knowledge possessed by coaches can actually be determined, categorised, and deemed 'effective' through different coaching domains. This is done through their ability to interact, engage, and instil belief in their participants through what they term the four C's: competence, confidence, connection, and character. In simple terms, these are athlete outcomes, that the ability/extent of the coaches' professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge (coaches' knowledge). Working this way, through marrying the athlete outcomes to the coaches' knowledge, helps us build upon what would have been a more one-dimensional approach of just focusing on coach knowledge and any possible episodes of didactic delivery.

And yet despite this understanding and conceptual framework, a number of problems continue to face those trying to clearly define any idea of sports coaching expertise. Many of these problems are, no doubt, fundamentally related to the difficulty of clearly defining what coaching itself is. In fact, it is widely acknowledged that coaching is not necessarily something to which any one particular definition can be applied in a criterion like fashion. This is because it consists of many skills, ways of approaching problems, and is at the very least multi-faceted in both its practice and its scope. However, one widely acknowledged concept to help us understand coaching, as a whole, is in

the way that we use the term the 'coaching process'. Briefly, this term is seen to represent both the relationship between a coach and his performers and any means and strategies that are used to improve performance (5-7).

But as helpful as the concept of the coaching process is, we still face still significant problems when we look to use it to help us understand the entirety of what sports coaching does and means. Indeed, Lyle (8) quite clearly states that the coaching process is "messy, complex, contested, and interpersonal" (p.298). So using the term the coaching process is helpful more in allowing us to realise the scope of sports coaching without, necessarily, understanding the real nature of it. Perhaps much of this difficulty in developing a fundamental understanding of sports coaching might be traced back to the way that it has oftentimes been described as a science. Much of the reason for this can be attributed to the way in which ideas of early sports coaching became enmeshed with the disciplinary subsections of sport science: biomechanics; physiology; nutrition; and psychology (9-10). But in categorizing sports coaching through the term/lens of science, we probably are missing much of what really happens in different domains of coaching, and disentangling how this all relates to the sport experiences of many requires sustaining requires an understanding of subjectivity and wider context.

So in sum, if we are to use this type of view – that is, that sports coaching is a 'science' - questions remain as to whether the very status of coaching is given suitable justice and thought. And it is here that this opinion paper reiterates a multi-dimensional approach that advocates sports coaching as a vocation, a craft, and in as much as it currently can do in the absence of a single overarching professional body, a role that requires substantial knowledge and ability. Given this, the aim of this opinion paper is to present the idea that common and best practice for coaches, and recognition of professional expertise, can be seen through the ability of coaches to use reflection and – in a multi-dimensional fashion – to act and perform in a reflexive fashion.

Defining Professionalism and Professional Expertise

I start by revisiting the contested ideas of expertise in sport coaching, Given the consistent emphasis on the value of sport for a variety of social, economic, and physical benefits by many governments, there are also increasing demands and expectations on youth, recreation, and performance coaches and a continued call for more robustly qualified practitioners in all of these sport coaching domains (8-10).

Consequently, the question of how best we might define professionalism in coaching seems a reasonable enough question to ask. This may seem, at first glance, a relatively easy enough premise to answer given any simple definition of professionalism as some form of paid work, but if we are to use the notion of professionalism through expressing something of quality or expertise, then it becomes somewhat trickier. As expressed previously, sports coaching can refer to a variety of contexts, domains, and practice. Yet a key difference between many of these areas is the extent to which the development of performance underscores the nature of the coaching itself. Consider, for example, how coaching in professional sport differs from coaching in the community context. The ethos, focus, and scope of coaching in professional sport are entirely different to that of coaching in areas of social deprivation. However, it is worth remembering that there exist a number of key commonalities in how coaches are seen to manage, develop, and impact on the groups that they work with.

Nevertheless, whilst there are commonalties in our understanding of coaching, despite the fact that it operates across a diverse range of different contexts, with no clear framework accurately positioning any idea of professionalism in sports coaching becomes difficult. And whilst some effort is made to articulate coaching on a national and international level through bodies such as UK Coaching and the International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE), and many NGBs look to license and accredit what they consider mastery of coaching skills through a series of qualifications and recognition, there is still no overarching professional body in the UK and many other western countries. Not like those seen in teaching, social work, or law, all of whom have professional bodies overseeing them and ask for, in what should be no surprise, specific and definable sets of criteria to be met by prospective candidates.

Alongside this base of work-like criteria, many of these professional bodies specifically refer to, and often have as their starting point, the idea of professional expertise. In fact, what is common

when we consider the use of the term 'professional' is the idea that those who are accorded such an occupational title are holders of a distinct body of knowledge and skill-set that, in effect, demonstrates this idea of professional expertise (11). Central to all of these areas then is the idea that any concept of expertise is critical to how as professions, practitioners can best manage their roles, responsibilities and skills, and sometimes how the professions can deliver professional development programmes that fully constitute the demands and nature of their occupations. Moreover, many ideas of expertise in all of these areas seem to suggest that there are significant areas of compatibility throughout all of them, that help in understanding what constitutes expertise in terms of dialogical principles. In a professional sense then, a review of literature suggests that there is considerable agreement across these areas in how expertise can be seen through the way in which practitioners can communicate, recall information, and then be able to skilfully apply methods in order to improve, (i.e. through skills, productivity, or performance), in some way, those that they are working with (11-12).

By considering these themes, we can also reflect on how the use of the term professional has changed over time. In effect, the use of the term has shifted from one which assumed expertise, to one which is based on a more systematic demonstration of knowledge and functional capability. Houlihan (13) discussed how a broader understanding of 'professions' developed through the 1970's to what we now see as roles that operate in a more managerial capacity. But in order to see how this idea of professions changed, it is important to understand how this 'evolution' of professionals to managers was through what might be considered a broad continuum. This continuum can be seen to have had, on the one end, an autonomous approach to work and an implicit understanding that the 'professional' knew what they were doing, and at the other end a more disciplined (in this sense, rigid, or even, unresponsive) approach that enabled 'managers' to direct and respond to more bureaucratic objectives inherent within an audit culture. Irrespective of this, specialisation and expertise within professions became apparent through declarative, substantive knowledge in the field, and mastery over what expertise might look like in practice.

Expertise in areas that have some relation to coaching then, such as through leadership, imparting information, and collaborative goal-oriented actions, has been recognised within vocational areas such as education (12), social work (14), law (15), and the public sector (11), potentially help us frame the concept of expertise within quality sport coaching. As an example, Nash and Collins (16) discuss and identify a number of criteria which emphasise a deeper understanding of expertise in sport coaching, and possibly relate to concepts of professionalism. These include, but are not exhaustive to, the ideas that expertise is domain specific, that experts in sport coaching can recognise patterns and develop solutions, that they are flexible, can adapt, and that they can structure their knowledge to iterate between multiple determinants and outcomes. Common to understanding the relationship between these types of criteria, professional practice, and what is required to successfully integrate and implement them, is that all of these recognised indicators of professional expertise require higher order thinking and reflective skills, and professionalism in application (17).

Reflective Practice

The essence of what may be termed 'professionalism' can also potentially be seen through the work of Schön (18--19) who sees those capable of high-end work, productivity, creativity, and effectiveness as "instrumental problem solvers who select technical means best suited to particular purposes" (19:3). In addition to this technical rationality, Schön(19) saw the construct of professionalism as being couched in artistry, and that "artistry is an exercise of intelligence" (p.13). In effect then, this idea of what artistry constitutes in professional practice is, in fact, an aggregation (and the development) of a repertoire of skills, and inherent abilities and competencies that proficient professionals seem to possess. Schön (19) sees the ability to cycle "through an iteration of moves and appreciations" (p.64) as, fundamentally, enabling practitioners to develop new lines of inquiry into a multitude of possible outcomes. And it these outcomes that can be read by those proficient in reflection and meta-cognition, that can allow professionals who possess a range of experiences and knowledge to apply them to a variety of situations.

In effect, this knowledge/experience capital allows practitioners/artists/*professionals* to engage in a sequence of hypotheses testing.

Considering the implications of coaching within the wide, complex, and contested nature of the coaching process, conceptualising professionalism in this manner is potentially important. In sum, this artistry/intelligence underpins the development of a repertoire of skills, and inherent abilities and competencies that proficient professionals seem to possess.

Sport coaching then, with its array of outcomes, might benefit from the idea of technical rationality as it becomes apparent through the experiential development of working/ professional decision making. In this sense, *reflection in action* in sport coaching can see 'artists' and experienced professionals make assessments that are correct, but based on intuition, judgements, and 'tacit recognition'.

For coaches then, reflective practice means taking our experiences as a starting point for learning and then, in a meaningful manner, transforming practice through effective reflection. Coaches are routinely, through recognised agreement of best practice in literature (8, 20-21) and formal coaching qualifications, asked to structure learning and development through the concept and application of reflective practice. This process of converting 'doing' into 'learning' oftentimes follows the following format: reflection on action – after the session; reflection in action – during the session (for instance, thinking on your feet); and reflection for action – planning and preparing (i.e., developing a mental plan of your session).

Reflection on action – arguably the most important – is seen to transform experience into knowledge and change in practice. This is because using and adhering to reflective practice is seen to develop greater self-awareness and help practitioners set goals, develop strategies, and re-conceptualise and thus reposition approaches to their work to make it more effective (21). Successful reflective practice has long been considered of vital importance throughout sport coaching literature and practice (22) with levels of reflection such as descriptive and critical, being typically cited as indicative of how self-regulated skill and contextual and applied learning can be put into practice (23). The first of these levels, descriptive, literal reflection (or evaluation) can be summarised through asking questions such as 'I could have done this', and 'should I have done that?'. The second, a more critical level, looks to more robustly analyse personal beliefs, assumptions and ideas. For instance, 'is winning a priority?', 'why am I coaching?', 'am I enjoying this, if not why not?', and 'in dealing with that situation what did I learn about myself?'(20). But reflection needs to move beyond superficial approaches to planning, doing, reflecting, and redoing…in order to more accurately reflect the notions of expertise that this opinion paper has so far presented. In order to do so, coaches must ask how deep can they can analyse and understand their selves?

Coaches may well reflect on technical practice, an incident that occurred (i.e. a misunderstanding with somebody else), what they might see and observe, the coaching environment (for instance, is it a professional environment? Are they happy in this environment?), and if possible - reflect on the totality of their practice, the session and the environment. But the question remains of just how critically and deeply we can reflect on ourselves. If our values, ideas, beliefs, and tastes are deeply embodied within us, can we change our behaviour, expectations, and delivery methods, or will we just change superficial elements of our practice?

Admittedly, alongside the descriptive and critical levels of reflection, there is a third level, autobiographical, that seeks to analyse the self and the very self-identity of practitioners. This level draws insight from particular events and personal experiences in the lives of practitioners that have shaped them and, significantly, their values and subsequent approaches to interactions and work. This may well help bridge a link to greater awareness and subsequently professional knowledge, and an ability to develop some of the previously mentioned criteria for expertise in sport coaching (such as recognising patterns, developing solutions, flexibility, and adaptability). Indeed, aligning Schön's (19) premise of technical rationality to this, with its productivity and creativity, helps us. But these approaches and understanding, in and of themselves, do not necessarily allow us to construct a greater totality of engagement with practice, and the features within expertise, without first reflecting on what happened. Reflective practice then is oftentimes predicated on developing awareness and learning post practice, potentially leading to a more limited practice repertoire. Here then, approaches to enabling coaches to reflect whilst in practice, and to ask themselves how their own behaviour, ideas, and beliefs are impacting on any given situation at any given time, can be given credence through the concept of reflexivity.

REFLEXIVITY

The concept/term of reflexivity is used in reseach methods, oftentimes through questioning the researchers' role, bias, and how individual 'truth' shapes practice and understanding (24), including in sport literature (25-26). Moreover, the idea of reflexivity is seen by many in Bourdieu's (27) concept of habitus (habits) that outlines how thoughts, beliefs, opinions, and ideas that are shaped by lived experience (i.e. class and education) lie beyond our 'consciousness' and shape our thoughts and bodily actions. In sum then, reflexivity is a contested term yet relatively widespread. And so without a comprehensive theoretical understanding and position underpinning it, much of the idea that it can be used for sport coaching risks becoming watered down, not fit for purpose, or even irrelevant.

However, Fook's (28) outline of reflexivity within the practice of social work offers such a framework. This framework sees reflexivity as on the one hand a product of theory embedded in practice and professional expertise through reflective processes, and on the other hand an ability to understand and take account for one's own interpretations, power relations, biases, and impact on any given context at any given time. In short, reflexivity is seen as a skill that allows practitioners to react, adapt, and operate in a manner that is cognisant of how interactions are fluid, in a contemporaneous manner. It is this premise of knowledge and theory creation, allied to an approach and understanding of context, that identifies characteristics of professional expertise. Asking sport coaches to locate themselves squarely within the process of interaction, fully cognisant of theirs and others' perspectives on subjectivity and inter-subjectivity, would allow them to make sense of a co-created reality and practice, as opposed to just acting as an arbitrator of an independent arena.

Contextuality then, is crucial to recognising specific behaviours and expectations which coaches might foist upon others, without understanding the full social and pollical context, and one's own power as an actor within it. Relationships then become crucial to the development and delivery of practice, and professional expertise can be seen to be facilitated through the mastery of reflexivity that identifies how understanding the whole context within which coaches are operating (i.e. the different perspectives and power relations inherent within it). It is this awareness and the immediacy of recognition, connection, and knowledge and theory creation, across different contexts, that can support notions of professional expertise. This paper thus posits that reflection then – acknowledged as normal working practice – can and should be enhanced by sport coaches through the concept of reflexivity (self-knowing and able to understand perceptions, power, and context in interpersonal relationships and interactions), in order to be more 'expert' practitioners.

REFERENCES

[1] Cushion CJ., NelsonL. Coach education and learning: Developing the field. In Potrac P, Gilbert W, J. Denison. (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Sports Coaching.* Oxon: Routledge; 2013. p.359-374.

[2] DinC, Paskevich D, Gabriele T,Werthner P. Olympic Medal-Winning Leadership. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*. 2015; 10:589-604.

[3] Crisp P. Leadership, Bridging, and Group-Game Engineering: Guidelines for Community Sport Coaches. *International Sport Coaching Journal*. 2020; 7(2):229-238.

[4] Cote J, Gilbert W. An Integrative Definition of Coaching Effectiveness and Expertise. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*. 2009;4(3): 307-323.

[5] GordonD. *Coaching Science*. Exeter: Learning Matters; 2009.

[6] North J. *The coaching workforce 2009–2016.* Leeds: Sports Coach UK; 2009.

[7] Robinson PE. *Foundations of sports coaching*. London: Routledge; 2014

[8] Lyle J. *Sports Coaching Concepts: a framework for coaches' behaviour.* Abingdon: Routldege; 2002.

[9] Meyers CM. Enhancing Sport Performance: Merging Sports Science with Coaching. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 2006;1(1):89-100.

[10] Day D. Craft Coaching and the 'Discerning Eye' of the Coach. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*. 2011;6(1):179-195

[11] Ericsson KA. *Development of professional expertise: Toward measurement of expert performance and design of optimal learning environments.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2009.

[12] Yielder J. An integrated model of professional expertise and its implications for higher education. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*.2004;23(1): 60–80.

[13] Houlihan B.Citizenship, civil society and the sport and recreation professions, *Managing Leisure.* 2001;6:1-14.

[14] Fargion S. Thinking Professional Social Work Expertise and Professional Ideologies in Social Workers' Accounts of Their Practice. *Journal of Social Work*;6(3):255–273.

[15] Sandefur RL. Elements of Professional Expertise: Understanding Relational and Substantive Expertise through Lawyers' Impact. *American Sociological Review*. 2015; 80(5):909–933.

[16] Nash C, Collins D. Tacit Knowledge in Expert Coaching: Science or Art? *Quest.*2006;58:465-477.

[17] Turner D, Nelson L, Potrac P. The Journey *Is* the Destination: Reconsidering the ExpertSportsCoach. Quest.2012;64(4):313-325.

[18] SchönD. *The Reflective Practitioner.* New York: Basic Books; 1983.

[19] Schön D. *Educating the Reflective Practitioner.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; 1987.

[20] Knowles Z, Gilbourne D, Borrie A, NevillA. Developing the reflective sports coach: A study exploring the processes of reflective practice within a higher education coaching programme. *Reflective practice*. 2001;2(2):185-207.

[21] Knowles Z, Tyler G, GilbourneD. Eubank, M. Reflecting onreflection: exploring the practice of sports coaching graduates. *Reflective Practice.* 2006;7:163- 179.

[22] Taylor S, Werthner P, Culver D, Callary B. The importance of reflection for coaches in parasport. *Reflective practice*. 2015;16(2):269-284.

[23] Poitras EG, Lajoie SP. A domain-specific account of self-regulation

[24] learning: The cognitive and metacognitive activities involved in learning through historical inquiry. *Metacognition and Learning.* 2013; 8:213–234.

[25] Salzman PC.On Reflexivity. *American Anthropologist*. 2002;104(3):805-813.

[26] Townsend RC, CushionCJ. 'Put that in your fucking research': reflexivity, ethnography and disability sport coaching. *Qualitative Research*. 2020;1–17. Available from: doi.org/10.1177/1468794120931349

[27] McNarryG, Allen-Collinson J, EvansAB. Reflexivity and bracketing in sociological phenomenological research: researching the competitive swimming lifeworld.*Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*. 2019; 11(1):138-151.

[28] BourdieuP. Science of Science and Reflexivity. Cambridge: Polity Press; 2004.

[29] Fook J. What Professionals Need from Research:Beyond Evidence-Based Practice. In SmithD. (ed). *Social Work and Evidence-based Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publications; 2004. p.29-46.

Citation: *Philippe Crisp,"Toward a Multidimensional Framework of Expertise and Professionalism in Sport Coaching. The Case for Adding Reflexivity to Reflective Practice ", Journal of Sports and Games, 2(3), 2020, pp. 28-33.*